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ABSTRACT

The field of international comparative education is constructed by relations of power and conflict. Comparative education contains an intrinsic tension between "sameness" and "difference." The dominant approach tends toward sameness and the elimination of variation, while one critique of the dominant approach tends toward an ultra-relativist focus on difference that would ultimately render comparison impossible. The principal practical role of comparative education, especially in its English language traditions, has been to provide technical support for hegemonic policy strategies of convergence, imitation, and homogenization, whereby national education systems are pushed toward global models based on idealized representations of "Western" education. This paper is positioned at a critical distance from the hegemonic relations of power in the field of comparative education, to (1) critique the positivist mainstream of the field; (2) review the field in light of the challenge of globalization, whereby the nation-state ceases to be the horizon of analysis, and the problem of homogenization of local/national identities is intensified; and (3) outline a preferred interdisciplinary basis for comparative education, drawing primarily on the history of education and educational sociology. The paper argues for an approach in which neither "sameness" nor "difference" are privileged, comparative education is reflexive about the relation between its techniques and its applications, theory takes primacy over methodology, and the qualitative is primary to the quantitative. In this approach the educational comparison is grounded in the refusal of hegemonic claims, the explanation of difference, and sympathetic engagement with "the other." Contains 14 notes and 88 references. (BT)

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Conference of the Comparative and International Education Society
San Antonio, Texas, 7-12 March 2000 8.30 am, Friday 10 March
Panel Session International Comparative Education in a Global Era: The past or the future?

'The door opens and the tiger leaps':

Theory and method in comparative education in the global era

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Abstract. The field of international comparative education (educacion comparada) is constructed by relations of power and conflict, relations that enter into and shape the research itself. Comparative education is a multi-disciplinary site constituted by (a) varying approaches to 'sameness' and 'difference' in educational comparison, and (b) quantitative and qualitative methods of social science. These technical and philosophic orientations are integrated in contingent fashion with different strategies of power. For example the normalising procedures used to match heterogeneous national data sets in cross-national comparisons of the performance of school systems have evolved to serve the needs of governments and global agencies.

Comparative education contains an intrinsic tension between 'sameness' and 'difference', both of which are necessary to it. The dominant approach tends towards sameness and the elimination of variation, while one critique of the dominant approach tends towards an ultra-relativist focus on difference which would ultimately render comparison impossible. The principal practical role of comparative education, especially in its English language traditions, has been to provide technical support for hegemonic policy strategies of convergence, imitation and homogenisation, whereby different national education systems are pushed towards global models based in idealised representations of 'Western' (and mostly American) education. The main sponsors of quantitative cross-country comparisons are the global agencies, and in a global era this homogenising potential of comparative education has increased. Nevertheless, comparative education can be attached to political projects other than hegemonic projects, and like all social science it is capable of functioning as a site of 'basic' academic research designed not to serve government or educational managers *per se* but to provide explanations, in this case explanations about educational systems and practices.

In this paper we locate ourselves at a critical distance from the dominant relations of power in the field of comparative education, in order (1) to critique the positivist mainstream of the field; (2) to review the field in the light of the challenge of globalisation, whereby the nation-state (the traditional unit of comparison) ceases to be the horizon of analysis, and the problem of homogenisation of local/ national identities is intensified; (3) to outline a preferred inter-disciplinary basis for comparative education, drawing primarily on the history of education and educational sociology. We argue for an approach in which neither 'sameness' and 'difference' are privileged over the other, comparative education is reflexive about the relation between its techniques and its applications, theory takes primacy over methodology, and the qualitative is primary in relation to the quantitative: an approach in which educational comparison is grounded in the refusal of hegemonic claims, the explanation of difference, and sympathetic engagement with 'the other'.

I. The field of comparative education

> 'Only madness is aphasic in its loneliness and only the mythical experience is ineffable in its intimacy. To communicate means to put one's self in some place between those two silences. And, at the same time, in some place between oneself and one's interlocutors, to accept that difference is the condition of dialogue'
>
> (Jean-Baptiste Fages, 1993).

Power and conflict in the field of comparative education

Employing Bourdieu's topographical terminology for the social, we can say that the discourses, theories, methods and techniques of comparative education, together with the networks of governmental and institutional practices in which comparative educational research and publication are implicated, constitute what may be referred to as a 'field' (Bourdieu 1983, 1988; Mollis and Marginson 2000). Employing Foucault's notion of discursive practices, we can say that comparative education is an academic sub-discipline that is integrated into circuits of power/ knowledge (Foucault 1972, 1977, 1980).

Some strands of educational research assume that education is separated from politics and power. We contest this, arguing that at the heart of comparative international education research, education intersects with power. Much of the research in the field consists of large-scale cross-country data collection financed by governments and global agencies, whose demands of power thereby shape the practices of knowledge. However comparative education is not simply 'programmed' in the corridors of power. It has an intellectual autonomy, and from time to time it produces insights and techniques that create new potentials for government and educational management. Thus even as power constitutes knowledge, so the reciprocal applies: new knowledge augments the capacities of power.

All social sciences are affected by their relationship with governmental power: perhaps comparative education has been shaped by that relationship more than most. Research genuinely independent of all external influences is more the exception than the rule. There is a transparent cultural affinity between the applied research and its base of institutional support. The global templates of education systems used in comparative studies, grounded in social models mostly taken for granted and implicit, are 'Western' in content and strongly influenced by education in the USA. This reflects the economic and intellectual

weight of the leading world powers, the geographical and political location of agencies such as the World Bank, and the personal predilections of academic faculty and agency personnel. The remark by Barber (1972) still applies: the 'models of development and modernisation turn out to bear a remarkable resemblance to the evolution of American industrial capitalism'.

Power and politics do not constitute an absolute closure of the imagination: like all social science, comparative education is capable of functioning as a site of open-ended 'basic' academic research designed not to serve government or educational managers *per se* but to provide explanations, in this case explanations about educational systems and practices. Further, the relations of power in comparative education are not unitary but are heterogeneous and contested, being constituted by a complex mixture of national-global forces. The field takes in many perspectives. Some research in comparative education is joined to political projects critical of official policies in education; and some is located in countries where the role of global agencies is problematic and American hegemony in economy, culture and educational policy is a serious concern. Some nations are leading nations, others are subordinate, and others marginal to the global centres of power: these locations shape their capacity to affect the evolution of comparative research and to draw benefits from it. In other words, power/ knowledge relations in comparative education are differentiated and complex, incorporating values and interests that are multiple in character and may conflict with each other, and which position the subjects in relation to the practices of comparative education and the power/ knowledge effects it creates.

Thus the field of comparative education is structured by power and conflict. Among the relevant interests are academic faculty identified with the field. They are not a homogenous group. Their relationships with governments and international agencies vary from dependency to independence, and from the position of supplicant to that of critic. They are located in North America, and also in many other countries. Their techniques vary from the qualitative to the quantitative and combinations of the two, and from surveys to case studies to historical analyses; and their disciplines also vary, from sociology to economics to history, to political science and administrative studies, to business and management, and various inter-disciplinary structures.

Sameness, difference and power

Making educational comparisons always involves both difference and sameness (Mollis 1991a). Firstly, comparison incorporates an *a priori* notion of difference, whether difference of degree as in unequal quantities of the same kind of object, or difference of kind as in the contrasting of objects with varying qualities. Secondly, comparison involves a search for resemblances between cases, as well as variations between them. Comparison is only possible on the basis of a common set of criteria used in making the comparison. This common set of criteria includes the identification of units for comparison, the quantitative and/or qualitative elements used in making the comparison, and a theoretical framework linking the common criteria. Neither sameness nor difference *can* be absolute. If sameness was absolute and the world was one homogenous place, there would be no meaningful variation and hence nothing to compare. If difference was absolute, there would be no common basis that would permit comparison. In that sense, each term, sameness and difference, provides the condition of possibility of the other.

'Difference' and 'sameness' appear to be in opposition. Yet it is not always so, either in logic, or in the real world. A real world education system may exhibit diversity in one respect and sameness in another, and the relation between the two may be complementary rather than antagonistic. For example, take school evaluation which measures learning on the basis of pre-given norms and ranks schools against each other. This process rests on a common template for comparison, and it encourages schools to converge with each other. Yet it also establishes a hierarchy of institutional outcomes, a form of difference. A second example is the school culture of Japan (Mollis 1991a, 1991b). Japanese public schools encourage homogeneity and unity in compulsory schooling, reinforcing values of equality and group consensus. In contrast the JUKUS (private educational institutions) offer a highly differentiated and individualised curriculum, promoting individual differences while training students for the entry requirements of the most prestigious educational institutions. The JUKUS reinforce a fiercely individualistic competition. Japanese scholastic culture is shaped by unity in the compulsory public school and differentiation within the parallel private institutions, coexisting within the same national setting. The two kinds of education are in tension, yet they are also share a common division of labour, and the tension between them is formative of Japanese education and social relations.

The process of comparison allows us to make distinctions between phenomena from the same set. The closer we look and the more complex the criteria used for observation and measurement, the more we turn sameness into difference. In that respect qualitative studies based on complex case work - where there is always more to investigate than can

ever be encompassed - contain a *prima facie* bias towards the creation of difference and incommensurability between the cases, eliminating the possibility of comparison itself. But the process of comparison can also turn diverse phenomena into similar phenomena. For example, take quantitative cross-national comparisons of educational achievement. Although the same numerical data have different meanings in each national context, when presented in a cross-country table the data do not display contextual variations. A '7' from Norway looks the same as a '7' from Malaysia regardless of the circumstances in which each '7' was produced. Even in qualitative studies which provide a more content-rich and context-rich description of each national case, there is a moment of abstraction which occludes some elements particular to each nation. Here the process of comparison contains a *prima facie* bias towards the creation ('discovery') of sameness, and again, towards the elimination of the possibility of comparison itself.

To reiterate, neither sameness nor difference can be absolute, or the potential for meaningful comparison is lost. However, much of the field is bedeviled by work pushing towards one extreme or the other, either of sameness (universalism) or difference (ultra-relativism). Epstein (1998) contrasts an absolutist method that imposes uniform models on the cases, and an ultra-relativist approach that treats every case as completely different:

> One uses 'comparison' to generalise about schools across cultures; the other employs it to grasp the unique character of a nation's schools. These perspectives are not simply different but mutually exclusive (Epstein 1998, 34).

The dominant approach in comparative education, connecting to the requirements of government and international agencies, is a semi-universalist position. It tends towards absolute sameness (homogeneity) between national education systems, while preserving a limited form of difference as inequality as the basis of comparison. Comparative league tables of national system performance, beloved by international agencies and used by national governments to drive internal changes in education systems, are prepared either by matching national data sets up to each other, or by cross-country surveys. In this process the comparativist eliminates *all* local features, all forms of difference except for measured differences in the criteria selected for comparison. The result is an outcome deceptively simple, the transparent 'performance' of each national system. The data soon take on a power of their own. What has been lost has been rendered invisible. Busino comments:

> Comparativism has been invariable in the search of identity. But of an ambiguous identity ... It has only been the search for an illusion, for an ideal: the identity assured by science, the function of identity of a culture that places science in the heart of all its values ... In a culture that raises reason as eminent value, logic as the supreme procedure with its demonstrative tests, comparison is the means to disguise the verdicts of deduction and induction, to argue what is easy for us to demonstrate (Busino 1986, 211-214).

Here comparison is reduced to a method that fulfills two types of goal: (1) to identify similarities between the object of study and another object; and (2) to identify a limited form of difference as deficiency, either by comparing one education system against another, or against an ideal type (Kempner et al 1998, xiii). This is difference expressed not as qualitative difference, but as unequal amounts of a single common quality. This approach to comparison excludes the 'other', and the possibility of discovering 'otherness' or 'alterity', the state of being other or different. It excludes what might be called 'deep difference'.

This notion of difference as inequality fulfills certain policy needs. By providing computable data attributable to 'performance' it enables the allocation of deficiency, failure and blame. It produces data-based hierarchies between national systems, and normalises inequalities of status and resources. It helps to encourage all national systems to follow a common blueprint for education reform, a single path to 'success'. Of course, only a minority of nations can fully 'succeed', when 'success' is measured in a league table-style comparison. In that sense is impossible for all nations to complete the same development path. The journey is universalised, the destination is not. *De facto*, global homogenisation, rather than universal educational achievement, becomes the horizon of policy.

In the modern era homogenising systems, in which difference is defined as inequality, are sometimes associated with strategies of democratisation and improved intra-systemic articulation (Mollis 1993, 26). Despite their role in modernisation such strategies are also in some respects conservative, narrowing the scope for innovation. By specifying numerical measures of system performance for comparative purposes, these strategies of difference-as-inequality tend to suppress in advance the unexpected, ambiguous, the complex, the idiosyncratic, and (in global strategies of equalisation) the nationally-specific. In global comparison, any potential for national variations in the system-level criteria themselves is lost. When national systems focus on performance as measured in the

common comparison, a homogenising logic becomes installed. Over time, all systems tend to become the same.

Difference-as-inequality can also serve the objective of management control. The same homogenising logic entered university evaluation and quality assurance around the world in the 1990s (Mollis and Marginson 2000). The common denominator in these systems is the construction of top-down homogenous indicators of institutional educational quality, used to create categories for classifying different academic institutions, often for financial distribution. In this process the organisational particularity, history, and differential mission of each university, and the multiplicity of interests and practices associated with the diversity of disciplinary fields, are obscured or ignored (Becher 1993; Diker 1993).

The ultra-relativist position, in which different cultures are wholly heterogenous, takes the opposite extreme. This position is ironic, self-contradictory, a universal generalisation about particularity. It is premised on respect for difference but here 'difference' has become abstracted and ahistorical: 'notions of cultural incommensurability appear to rest on the assumption that frameworks are totally closed and unchangeable' (Young 1997, 497-499) yet identities are more fluid than this. Arguably, in a global era identities are more multiple, hybrid, cosmopolitan and changeable than before, suggesting the ultra-relativist position – far from being fashionably 'post-modern' - is increasingly obsolete. The ultra-relativist position obscures the common ground between national systems and denies the mutual effects in existing international relationships. It not only blocks the possibility of comparison, it handicaps analysis of the dynamics of each system, in which national, global and international elements are inter-meshed. Like homogenisation, it ultimately precludes sympathetic engagement with the object of research. It cannot interpret difference.

In summary, we take an agnostic position on the relationship between sameness and difference, rejecting the extremes of both universalism and relativism (Young 1997). We argue that in comparative education neither sameness or difference can be absolute, and the design of theories and methodologies should reflect this. Against the universalist position, we argue that method in comparative education should be orientated towards the interpretation of differences, and the recognition of the 'other'. It is necessary to devise techniques that will foreground identified forms of difference, and enable unexpected real world differences to surface within the discourse. Against the ultra-relativist position, we argue that comparative education needs to interpret individual differences not simply as

terminal, but in the context of a wider set of variations; recognising that there are commonalities structured by the relations between 'others', and between 'other' and 'self'.

In making comparisons, sameness and difference are interpenetrated and omnipresent, not as uniform 'same-sameness' and 'same-difference' but in a myriad of heterogeneous forms. The interactions and tensions between these two poles give the field much of its ambiguity, vibrancy, dynamism and varied potentials. This points to a principal methodological discipline. It is necessary to avoid privileging either sameness or difference in any lasting sense: to use each to interrogate the other, constantly moving between them.

Methods, techniques and power

Early work in comparative education, in the 'traditional-classical' perspective, elaborated a set of interacting characteristics or variables, in the form of a mechanism, which were seen to compose each national education system (Mollis 1990).[1] The objective was to identify the forces or conditions determining educational development. National differences in the variables explained national variations in educational systems and outcomes. Implicit in the methodology was an ethnocentric historical narrative in which the evolution of 'Western' schooling was standardised and universalised for all nations. It was imagined that with all nations sharing a common set, albeit with historically-grounded local variations, 'selected features of school adminstration, staffing instructional methods, and curriculum could be imported into another country and grafted onto its developing systems' (Eckstein 19**, 7).

Later the 'traditional-classic' was supplanted by the 'empirical-scientific' perspective, represented by Bereday (1957) and Anderson (1959). Bereday argued that comparative analysis should be preceded by an abstract schema, a guiding hypothesis for the collection and presentation of proven facts. Bereday and Anderson criticised the classical era studies as macrocosmic, ahistorical, impressionistic, and exclusively limited to national systems of education. They presented their framework as more analytical, microcosmic and precise, with categories that were sustained scientifically by empirical proof. They argued that the function of comparative education was to empirically or statistically establish a relationship between social, political and economic factors in education (Mollis 1990, 229). Meanwhile the notion of a 'normal' historical path for national system development

remained, implicitly or explicitly, part of policy thinking and therefore part of comparative education.

In the 1960s comparative education was colonised by instrumental positivism (Hesse 1980), which remained influential ever after, supported by a narrative of 'normal' system development that varied with shifts in policy discourse. Positivism in social science dated from the last third of the nineteenth century. Making classifying a central tenet of its cosmogenesis, it moved from reality as 'chaos' to reality as 'cosmos' by discovering regularities which were formulated in a fashion parallel on one hand to the forms of Newtonian physical sciences, on the other to the institutional imperatives, the power/ knowledge specifications, required of it as social science. The sociology of comparative education was a version of the positivist structural functionalism which had such a strong impact in the sociology of education. Feito analyses structural functionalism as follows:

> The bourgeois ideology has always tried to eliminate the political character of the state institutions, among them the school... the bourgeois individual thinks, in a fetished way, of the separation of politics and economy, conceiving of the state as something independent from civil society. The liberal approach declares that the individual is universal - he/she subscribes to norms of conduct established by culture, occupation, and social position - and at the same time the individual is a separate entity... The school is neutral and the process of selection is presided over by universalistic criteria. The culture transmitted by the school is the universal culture, the only valid culture (Feito 1990, 285).

By the mid 1960s the functionalist paradigm dominated among American comparative researchers (Morrow and Torres 1995). They accepted the notion of social stability and the instrumental role of education in national development as framed in universal theorisations of the relationship between education, economy and society, such as human capital theory (Marginson 1997, 92-118). These scholars showed great interest in educational systems of the third world, an interest sustained by American foreign policy and aid programs with their funds for research in geographically strategic areas such as China, South Asia and Latin America (Altbach 1990). Through the accumulating projects funded under the banner of 'international co-operation', comparative education moved closer to the priorities of the leading capitalist countries and global financial agencies such as the World Bank.

Meanwhile comparative methodologies pushed further in the direction of positivist social science (Wallerstein 1991a; Morrow and Brown 1994). Educational planners schooled in positivism believe there is a fundamental social order underlying the dynamic of things themselves; an order discernible through the methodical and rigorous application of a specific social science. The methodology must reflect the premises of all scientific method, modelled on the natural sciences, particularly Newtonian physics: foundationalism, objectivity, the search for control and manipulation of variables, experimentalism or quasi-experimentalism, universality, and rationality (Silos 1995). This scientific method enables the discovery of regularities which can be measured and quantified; applied in experimental or quasi-experimental analyses; used to study correlation and causalities; or manipulated (controlled) in future analyses, assuming the status of laws or conventions common to the field.[2] These laws can be summed up in concise, simple phrases, and presented mathematically and used, subject to the falsifiability of the hypothesis, to plan and manipulate the construction of social realities.

As Epstein notes, positivism in comparative education valorises a limited range of techniques, all quantitative. 'Only empirical statements about education are scientific and only scientific statements are meaningful' (Epstein 1998, 32). Science is equated with methods and techniques, producing a technical-instrumental form of knowledge, characterised by epistemological preferences such as the preoccupation with statistical refinement; the use of surveys as a method of investigation; the progress of science as knowledge accumulated by induction and/or verification; the presumption of value neutrality in data gathering; and investigations on a massive scale, for example large research teams whose research findings must be formulated in laws or generalisations. Theory and investigation are reduced to matters of technical precision: for example, lengthy discussion about sample size without considering whether the phenomena to be studied can be measured. Test scores or participation rates are abstracted from the economic, political, social and cultural conditions which created them, as if they can be explained by universal causalities without reference to their context.

In the process, the positivist method suppresses much of what is real from view. Take the quantitative statistical analysis of education systems. In designing indicators for use in statistical analysis it is necessary to create deductive generalisations which begin from evidence about the fragmentation of social reality. This approach can make explicit a series of traits in reality, but at worst, by highlighting 'common' themes may hide or obscure important differences, not to mention the variety and plurality of the intervening elements. The method hides the very same diversity in quantitative realities that the indicators are

meant to reflect. To refer to a simple example, to say that in Spain public education comprises 60 per cent of the elementary and secondary enrolment, is ambiguous at best, given that in certain autonomous communities such as Catalonia the private sector represents more than 50 per cent of enrolments (Raventos Santamaria 1990).

Noah (19**, 10) provides a revealing insight into positivist methods. To him the primary purpose of comparative education is to 'establish generalised statements about education valid for more than one country', universal 'laws' of comparative education.[3]

> Comparative education ... emerges as the attempt to use cross-national data to test propositions about the relationship between education and society and between teaching practices and learning outcomes (Noah and Eckstein 1969, 114).

> [The objective is] to make general 'law-like' cross-national statements, bringing in country names only when the ability to make valid generalisations across countries fails (Noah 19**, 12).

According to Noah comparative education places primacy on 'the careful identification, validation and measurement of variables', mapping the relationship between these variables in each nation. The different country maps are used to devise scientific generalisations. Diversity only comes into play 'when no amount of within-system (nation) adjustment of either the independent or dependent variables can reduce the across-nation differences in observed relationships'. *At this point*, when 'the introduction of additional variables yields no gain in explanatory power', factors such as 'national character' or 'historical background' are introduced. National specificities are invoked *only* when the spare, abstract universal law falters! Noah contrasts this method with what 'used to be' the primary goal of comparative education, 'the most complete description possible of other education systems, and the most telling comparison of one system with another' (Noah 19**, 12).

This suggests 'comparative' education should have no intrinsic interest in individual countries, in exploring data in context, or in subjecting its general 'laws' to tests of local relevance and cross-national transferability. There could hardly be a clearer statement of the homogenising effects of positivist methodology, its willful ignorance of national specificities and the dynamics of difference, and of its fetish about the natural sciences.

In the face of complex questions, positivism strives for dualistic 'yes' and 'no' answers. Yet social theory suggests that in contrast to the natural sciences, the social sciences exhibit a principle of ambiguity (for example Dow 1990). Given the open-ended and ultimately idiosyncratic nature of social life, many events do not conform to rules of universality. When such rules are invoked, the notion of universality is invalidated; or, rather, it becomes not a precondition for scientific work but another 'contested terrain' To account for this, the conventional sociology of education now resorts to quantitative, statistical probabilistic models in place of laws or law-like explanations. But more complicated analyses seeking to understand the historical nuances and interrelations of things, using complex multi-disciplinary analyses which are problematic, tentative or uncertain, are rejected as unnecessary (Samoff 1990). Even if pertinent in theoretical terms, they are seen to lack usefulness for government, which is based on well-defined and immediate problems and motivated not by the search for explanations but by actions which quickly and efficiently resolve those problems. Instrumental positivism in comparative education is not only intellectually simpler, it is a striking example of the manner in which the social sciences have learned to speak to power in easily digested terms, regardless of the cost for our deeper understandings and our larger capacities for action.

'Globalisation', nation and power

History is not always incremental, but is prone also to sudden changes and breaks. 'The door opens and the tiger leaps' (Woolf 1931, 111). The tiger of our times is 'globalisation'. Like all fields in the social sciences, comparative education is facing an epistemological discontinuity that is compelled by the sudden salience of global forms and relations. In designing educational comparisons amid 'globalisation', the commitment of mainstream comparative education to universalistic and linear interpretation, its failure to encompass fragmentation, ambiguity and contingency, even to move freely between general and particular, and between quantitative analysis and qualitative analysis, are an increasingly serious handicap.

There is a qualitative change in global relations, drawing together transformations in the realms of the economic, technological, social, cultural and political often separated in conventional analysis (Appadurai 1996). 'Globalisation' remakes the power/ knowledge relationships at the heart of comparative education. It impacts the central unit of analysis, the nation-state, and touches all aspects of identity. Matters of sameness and difference, the

self and other, are all being reworked. These changes cannot be grasped using conventional positivist frameworks and static categories. Comparative education has never been innocent of the global: its positivist forms have contributed to the homogenising 'globalisation' of national education systems; there is continuity in the field as well as change. Nevertheless comparative education is not reflexive in relation to its own global effects, and so far has failed to theorise the changing global/ national relationship. 'Globalisation' has caught comparative education unprepared, isolated from the extraordinary fecundity of social and cultural theory and still sustaining the concepts, methods and development narratives of the previous era. It deploys the nation-state as its basic unit of analysis much as it did in the 1960s. This provides us with an obligation and an opportunity for its re-theorisation.[4]

First, a comment about the term 'globalisation'. We understand 'globalisation' simply as 'becoming global'. We do not share the neo-liberal definition, meaning the formation of a universal world market and the ultimate elimination of politics and the nation-state. Neo-liberal 'globalisation' is so contaminated by this normative agenda as to render it useless as an analytical concept. We recognise however that the neo-liberal term is potent, having colonised government, the corporate world and popular cultures: to distance ourselves from it we use 'globalisation' in inverted commas (''). Perhaps another term is needed.[5]

What then does 'becoming global' mean? To speak of internationalisation and the blurring of national frontiers requires a cognitive map which provides for the elaboration of comparisons beyond simplistic images of a global village inhabited by the technologically privileged. If 'global' and 'globalisation' can take meanings other than the neo-liberal, these terms refer to integrated systems and relationships beyond the scale of the nation, at continental, regional and world levels. 'International'- inter-national, between nations – trade has a very long history (Hirst and Thompson 1996), cross-continental religions date back over two thousand years, and 'Western' academic knowledge has been world-wide for at least two centuries. Nevertheless, in the last three decades or so a further change has occurred, in which global relations have become more extensive and intensive.[6]

This change is marked above all by 'thick' networks of instantaneous communication and the new forms of identity, community and action they facilitate. The effects of electronic communications and complex data transfer do not have to be spelled out to anyone working in higher education. In finance, screen-based transactions enable the formation of round-the-clock world markets and an unprecedented mobility of capital, constituting the final death-blow for the old Keynesian policies of closed national

economic management. There is ever-growing trafficking in global products, symbols and ideas; and an expanding global dimension in the popular imagination, fed directly by global imaging and by universal-American themes in media, popular entertainment and consumption.

Theorisations of cultural 'globalisation' conjure up an incessant changeability, flicker and fleetingness, derived from the rapid turnover of images and systems. Nevertheless, it is important not to fall into a universalistic 'globalisation' which loses locality, contingency and cultural context. We do not share the ultra-relativist position in some of the literature, where 'globalised' cultures are *necessarily* transcendent, subject to perpetual reinvention and the abolition of history. Looking closer, we often find that global 'transcendence' is incremental as well as discontinuous. Much of what emerges as 'reinvention' is the same practices recycled, attached to a few novel signs. 'Perpetual reinvention' is one of the markers of the neo-liberal ideology of 'globalisation', creating a continuous obsolescence and ever-new products and markets, while basic relations of power remain unchanged. While novelty and discontinuity are apparent, against theorisations of 'globalisation' or post-modernism as a *complete* break from the past, we emphasise the continued relevance of grounded studies in history, sociology and political economy for situating educational practice. For example, global changes in identity occur in conjunction with material changes in the flows of people, goods, capital and electronic messages, and these flows are capable of empirical measurement. One case in point is the relationship between people movement and identity. Growing numbers of people are moving around the world for business, labour, study and migration, creating a more complex cultural mix. In this respect active 'globalisation', while excluding the poorest sector of the world's population who lack access to telecommunications and are confined to (and by) images of global consumption, is not confined to the elite sectors:

> Western European states have acquired their most multiethnic character to date, developing significant non-European immigrant communities. Japan has acquired significant foreign communities for the first time, while America is returning to levels of foreign population not experienced since the height of immigration in the years before the First World War. The autonomy of nation-states is being redefined by the impact of past legal migrations and the continuing impact of illegal migration... notions of citizenship and national identity are being renegotiated in response to

contemporary patterns of global migration and cultural globalisation. But in many cases the trajectory of these negotiations is far from clear (Held et al. 1999, 326).

The more mobile and more complex cultural mix is associated with changing forms of mobile and hybrid identity, whereby people undergoing new influences use media, communications and return travel to maintain contact with their previous place-locations, their previous selves (Babha 1990; Appadurai 1996). Traveling is less a passage from one absolute place-identity to another, more an absorption of additional strands of identity in a setting in which 'selves' are cosmopolitan, linked to several cultural groups (Rorty 1983) and simultaneously affected by kin-based, local, national, regional and global markers. International students, and academic faculty, often assume hybrid identities. While complex identities are beyond statistical aggregation and population-to-population comparison, they can be studied using qualitative research methods such as intensive interviews, as well as the examination of documents, artifacts and the content of communications.

It is often noted that 'globalisation' is associated with two contrary trends: a trend to world-wide convergence, homogeneity, and a trend to difference via more extensive and complex encounters with cultural 'others' (Keyman 1997). At the same time, paradoxically, 'globalisation's' homogenising systems, reaching into every corner, render heterogeneous difference more uniform than before. Globalisation foregrounds those differences that appear within the frame of global systems, while progressively eliminating the potential for 'others' located outside those systems and opaque to them. Global systems in finance and communications, and most world products, are carriers of particular national traditions, those of Anglo-America. For example, four fifths of all electronically-coded information is in English (Held et al 1999, 346). Nevertheless, the notion of 'globalisation' as an *automatic*, universal and unstoppable 'Americanisation' should be resisted. Appadurai (1996) emphasises that mobile identities are determined not by hegemonic culture *per se* but by their subjects. There is also the possibility of plural global systems. A strong version of 'Americanisation' constitutes one set of possibilities. More fragmented and diverse kinds of 'globalisation' constitute others. Likely we will experience a mix of the two, with 'Anglo-Americanisation' particularly strong in economic sectors such as finance.

Where educational practices will fall is uncertain. Nevertheless, 'globalisation' clearly has immense implications for education. As well as its effects in reconstructing the

potentials of national government, the incubator of modern schooling and higher education systems, there is the growth of international markets in on-site and on-line education, and ever-more people movement and communications associated with education. World-wide the number of international students has grown from one to two millions since. On-line education, crossing national borders, hastens the cultural inter-penetration of nations and of their education institutions. This is not a free and equal exchange: the global salience of European, English-language and particularly American education are more than apparent.

In national policy, 'globalisation' means that international educational comparisons, once the province of a few specialists, are often now the terrain on which national policy is conceived and formulated. This raises the stakes in comparative education. Oyen remarks:

> People flow between countries in ways that have never been seen before, at the same rate that international organisations are established non-stop. Politicians go for comparisons to increment their comprehension and control of national events, though they end up accepting intuitive comparisons to justify a great part of their policy preferences. Bureaucrats make extensive use of national and international statistics in their comparisons, and industry and the world of business constantly compare the social context of national and international markets ... This tendency to globalisation has changed our cognitive map. While some cultural differences tend to vanish, others become more pronounced. Comparative investigation probably has to change, going from emphasising the search of uniformity in the variety, to studying the preservation of enclaves of unity amid an ever increasing homogeneity and uniformity (Oyen 1990).

Oyen's last point is important and we return to it below. In relation to theory and method in comparative education, the implications of 'globalisation' vary depending on the theorisation of 'globalisation' adopted. For the neo-liberal, the implication is 'more of the same': comparative education should continue to test national education systems against global templates and advise governments on how best to converge with ideal global forms. From this standpoint it is convenient to leave the nation-state at the centre of comparative methodology, thereby protecting global agencies such as the World Bank from scrutiny and debate while maximising the pressure on 'sovereign' national governments to conform. However from the standpoint of independent scholarship (and that of non-American national identity!) the key issue posed by 'globalisation' is its 'relativisation' of

the nation-state. Governance remains national in form, and nation-states continue to be central players in a globalising world, if only as the local agents of global forces (Mollis and Marginson 2000). Nevertheless, the nation-state is now operating within global economic constraints, and while it remains an important concentration of power with the potential for self-determination and global influence, it no longer provides a sealed cultural environment.

We will mention four implications of global geo-politics for comparative education. First, research on the role and effects of the global agencies. There has been important work here in the past, such as Carnoy's path-breaking *Education as cultural imperialism* (1974). Arnove (1980) provides an early call for an analytical framework extending beyond the nation-state. Nevertheless, notwithstanding recent contributions by Munday (1998), Jones (1992, 1997), Taylor et al (1999) and Mollis (1999) among others, further critical-empirical study of the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, Asian Development Bank, Inter-American Development Bank and similar agencies; and the shift from the socio-cultural UNESCO to the economically-defined-World Bank as the principal global agency in education; would be illuminating. Another research site is constituted by the emergence of regional groupings with substantial political, economic and cultural roles, such as the European Union, NAFTA, and MERCUSOR in the 'Southern Cone' of the Americas.

Second, the traditional comparative map of the world, in which all nations are formally similar and ranked according to their level of development on a single scale, is more inadequate than ever. It eliminates global phenomena, it fails to explain power relations between nations, and between national and global, and it eliminates the potential for qualitative national differences. This suggests the need for a new geo-political cartography tracing the flows of global effects, and the patterns of imitation, difference, domination and subordination in education policy and practice. Do the categories of 'third' world' and 'North/South' have continuing relevance? Does the 'centre/ periphery' framework provide a useful structure for understanding hegemony in education policy? Is there more than one hegemonic centre of power in world education? For example, does the European Union have a major role to play in global developments, and what is its relationship to Anglo-American hegemony? Given the spread of English-language communications what is the longer term scope for an independent national and global approach in China, Japan or the Islamic world? What are the prospects for L'Espagnol as a

second global European language? These issues will fashion future national systems, and global educational links.

Third, the growing importance of cross-border international education foregrounds it as an object of research in its own right, one only partly encompassed by studies of national practices. International education sits at the intersection of global, inter-national and national systems. Comparative education needs to encompass the cross-national recognition of education qualifications (Harman and Meek 1999), the emerging pan-national systems of accreditation and quality assurance (van Damme 1999), and cross-border electronic distance education, which partly evades national regulation altogether.

Fourth, as noted 'globalisation' opens up a new potential for forms of identity other than the national; and enhanced recognition of that potential. The singular methodological focus on the nation downplayed supra-national cultural and religious identities (Shamsul 1999), and obscured intra-national regional variety in educational participation, resourcing and outcomes (Fry and Kempner 1996) despite some research in this area (for example Parrado 1998). This near exclusion of the regional is unsurprising. The modern nation-state is a mechanism for achieving national definition, political reconciliation and homogeneity; that is, a set of tools for *overcoming* political and cultural diversity. Now, the global 'relativisation' of the nation-state allows some regional and cultural diversities to resurface. Nevertheless, it is only where national infrastructure and economy provide protection from the homogenising effects of globalisation, that diverse identities are furthered. For example, minority cultures are stronger in Western Europe than in marginal African countries that lack the education and language policies and resources to facilitate indigenous identities.

Though 'globalisation' carries a dual potential for homogenisation and difference, it would not be hard to mount the claim that homogenising aspects are presently uppermost. The neo-liberal argument for school reform by Chubb and Moe (1990), grounded in the unique circumstances of locally-controlled US public schools, became required reading in policy circles everywhere. In the Anglo-American countries, courses for international students in business and information technology are forming a global elite steeped in English and Anglo-American business practices. Web-pages, travel and communications impart to American higher education institutions a more immediate visibility and salience in policy and practice outside the USA. The World Bank (1994) model for higher education reform, comprising mixed public and private sector provision and funding, corporate-style competing institutions, and the transfer of responsibility for educational

quality from government to institutions, has been widely adopted. Here the power/knowledge character of instrumental positivism is apparent, in the symmetry between its conceptual architecture and its real life global effects. The conceptual-methodological breakdown of national specificity is joined to the policy-practical deconstruction of subaltern national interests.

The means of transmitting the model are global, yet the model has a local first world, 'Northern' and particularly American identity. Global hegemony in comparative education does not mean the methodological extinction of the national dimension and its replacement by abstract universalism, so much as the elevation of the educational practices of one nation (or rather, an idealised version of those practices) over others, on a world scale. Other nations do not vanish, they are subordinated. Outside the USA, educators often experience the homogenising side of 'globalisation' as a strong 'Americanisation', which threatens to overwhelm all forms of identity that are not minor variations on global themes.

II. Comparative education for a global millenium

'One moment does not lead to another. The door opens and the tiger leaps'.
(Virginia Woolf, *The Waves*, 1931, p. 111).

Theories, reflexivities and power

What might be the elements of a re-forged comparative education that is responsive to the sudden qualitative changes we associate with 'globalisation'? We have argued that comparative education should not privilege either sameness or difference in a lasting sense. Similarly 'globalisation' creates both sameness and difference, and the relationship between these two moments is open-ended and contingent. Comparative education should encompass both the hegemonic culture *and* alternative voices, and move freely from macro to micro and *vice versa*.

The new cognition required by comparative education rests on awareness of the limitations of positivist methods, and a scepticism about grand narratives, data collection and data analysis techniques, without falling into the epistemological nihilism of gross relativism. It encompasses both methodologies and theories, subordinating the former to the

latter rather than *vice versa* as at present. It requires a flexible approach to theory, and draws at need on a broad range of academic disciplines. It encompasses both quantitative and qualitative methods, tending to subordinate the former to the latter rather than *vice versa* as at present. It deploys theory-driven research that seriously takes into account the uniqueness of the object of study, the historicity of the life world, the heterogeneity of social subjects and their evolving salient identities. It is reflexive, in that it understands the implications of the practical role of comparative education for its theories and methodologies. Finally, to a significant degree it is free from control by government or global interests. That is, the field of comparative education contains a major strand of independent research, dedicated to explanations and interpretations: independent research able to acknowledge and analyse the power/ knowledge effects of comparative education, strong enough to provide a counter-pole to the hitherto dominant instrumental research, and capable of affecting the content and methods of the latter.

We will now comment on three aspects: the reflexivity or 'self-knowledge' of comparative education, the primacy of theory over methodology, and the question of discipline base.

To produce a comparative thought we elaborate a set of linked characteristics within a system. The linking system, the 'prism' used in comparative research, determines the richness of the outcome (Matute 1991).[7] In constituting this 'prism', whose purpose is to 'throw light' on the object, theories, methodologies, empirical observations and quantitative analyses all constitute significant inputs. *Any* tools that can assist the task of explanation should be available. There is no one single path to understanding, whether *via* discipline, theory, method, or their integration. Recent perspectives in the Sociology of Education envisage reality as ever-changing, with a number of dimensions or layers which constitute independent spheres but share intertwined dynamics.[8] Here the acid test is not the internal consistency of the intellectual system *per se*, and still less the capacity of that system to produce specifically numerical data, but its capacity to generate *better explanations*, with 'better' defined by the purposes of the inquiry. The different tools may be heterogeneous to each other but still contribute to an overall research program (Dow 1990).

To those who argue that the choice of theory or method is driven not by its use but by its supposedly universal applicability, we would reply that no one approach can produce all relevant 'truth', that different theories and methods are associated with different 'truth

effects' and all truths are partial truths, and that we are not so rich in our understandings of comparative education that we can afford to neglect the insights of a range of approaches.

History suggests that in comparative education, various theories and methods are attached to particular agendas and effects. While some theories and methods are relatively generic, and their use is associated with sameness and globalism, others gain their life from particular sites or contexts, foregrounding locality and difference. Whereas quantitative performance indicators tend to narrow the range of identifiable difference, while producing sameness between national systems; detailed qualitative case studies are better at identifying and producing diversity. Particular theories and methods also have changing meanings in different contexts. To use a simple example, a comparison of student test scores has one meaning and effect in a hegemonic nation, and another in a poor and marginal one. The choice of method tends to determine whether the effect is homogenising or not, and whether it strengthens or weakens national identity or local institutions. Sometimes we may want to encourage sameness: for example by using homogenous cross-national comparisons of participation rates to measure the world-wide distribution of citizen rights to education. Sometimes we might want to highlight diversity, for example by tabulating not student literacy scores but variations in languages of instruction. The point is that the consequences of different methods need to be made conscious and explicit. In a reflexive field, researchers openly deploy disciplines, theories and methodologies according to the kinds of explanations they produce, and the power effects associated with them.

This is not to argue that all theories, methods and disciplines are interchangeable, equivalent or 'equally valid'. On the contrary, it is to argue they are incommensurable and hence *cannot be* equally ranked truths. Here we emphasise the distinction between theories and methodologies, and argue for the primacy of theory. Hitherto in comparative education, debate about analytical tools has mostly centred on questions of method. In the positivist tradition, claims to superior research are underpinned by statements about quantitative rigour. Theory is never absent, but it is mostly implicit, buried deep in various methodologial positions. Yet theory is often determining, whether or not it is made explicit (Dow 1990). Again, in a reflexive field the contents of theory *are* made explicit.

The argument for a multi-disciplinary approach is already widely accepted because of the range of disciplines used in comparative work. Few researchers themselves use a multi-disciplinary approach, so that the field largely consists of singular competing approaches. Multi-disciplinary and inter-disciplinary approaches enable a richer set of methods and

insights, and hence enable a greater complexity in the research.[9] At the same time, this poses the problem of the conceptual architecture used in integrating the disciplines.

The disciplines in qualitative comparison: history and social science

In moving beyond the limits of positivist sociology to an inter-disciplinary and primarily qualitative approach to comparative research, we envisage a central role for the history of education, and sociology, and potential contributions from other disciplines such as political economy, cultural anthropology, the history of curriculum, the sociology of science, and epistemology. We refer to the invitation of Tilly (1984)and Wallerstein (1991a) to 'Unthinking social sciences'. Pereyra reminds us, drawing from Tilly and Wallerstein:

> It seems like the task of today is Unthinking the science that was left to us by the founders of modern social theory like Augusto Comte and his followers, who constructed a positive method starting from historical comparison but which in essence was ahistorical ... It maybe necessary to Unthink this nineteen century science that still rules our cultural unconscious and the practice of so many researchers (Pereyra 1990, 31).

Comte, Spencer, and Durkheim assigned to the historical comparative method the role of 'precise laws, [and] determined relations of causalities'. That is how the comparative method was constituted, as hegemonic practice within a social theory equally hegemonic. Challenging this intellectual practice, other approaches to comparative methodology were integrated into the hegemonic social theory in a simplified form. Their theoretical relevance has been rediscovered in the classic analyses of Bloch and Weber, and more recently that of Skocpol. Bloch describes two uses of comparison in history (Abramhs 1989). One is characterised by the search for universal phenomena in cultures and societies set apart in time or space. Research following this trend is dedicated to finding similarities and continuities, but it tends to produce somewhat superficial conclusions. The second proceeds historically, by investigating the nature of each culture, which may lead to the study of neighbouring and contemporary societies, for example in Europe. In contrast to the first approach, this approach rejects the idea of 'going hunting for the resemblance' [*chasse aux ressemblances*] (Bloch 1982, 24).

Subsequently the French School of the Annales, including Braudel (1972), replaced the traditional dichotomy that positioned sociology as the 'science of regularities' and history as the

'science of particularities', with an interdisciplinary proposal articulating between social sciences and history. Socialising history, and historicising sociology, constitute an 'omnipresent' tendency in the recent literature (Abramhs 1989).[10] Skocpol positions comparative history as overcoming the gap between theory and history (Skocpol and Somers 1980; Skocpol 1984). She explains the utility of historical-comparative analysis thus:

> Historical-comparative analysis allows us to select national historical accounts as units of comparison ... it offers a valuable anchor for theoretical speculation. It encourages us to clarify the real causal arguments suggested by the great theoretical perspectives, and to combine different arguments, if necessary, to remain faithful to the ultimate objective, which is of course the true enlightenment of the causal regularities that exist throughout historical cases. Whatever the sources of theoretical inspiration, comparative history will only succeed if it does this task in a convincing way ... So long as it is not applied mechanically it can stimulate extensions and theoretical reformulation and also new ways of seeing concrete historical cases (Skocpol and Somers 1980).

Skocpol´s proposal provides elements linking comparison with 'a theory of differences' and above all, from the perspective of complementarity with history, even if we do not agree that 'the enlightenment of causal regularities' is the ultimate objective.

Thus against those who presume that 'globalisation' has abolished national histories, we assert the continued explanatory power of the history of education (Watson 1999, 235). At the same time, orthodox histories of schooling grounded in universal explanations about schooling culture should be challenged by 'alternative' histories to the official ones: not accounts asserting another equally totalising narrative,[11] but accounts that draw on different realities.[12] Here cultural anthropology has a contribution. For example Maynes (1985) argues that the 'process of schooling' was not uniform, as proclaimed by those histories of education that celebrate the notion of an hegemonic Eurocentric culture. It was not even homogeneous to different European countries, and it affected in varying ways the popular sectors and their everyday lives. Maynes mentions an Italian peasant who, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, used to find comfort when she went daily to school, in spite of the mnemonic routines and the rigidity of the methods, instead of remaining at home where she was brutally beaten and forced to perform strenuous chores.[13] This testimony was found in a personal diary, and it is useful in demystifying the idea of scholarisation as always repressive by nature, and contrary to the spontaneity of the

popular sectors. The history of education tackled from the perspective of the silenced, the anonymous actors constructing history from below, the non-official, alternative history, the history of the 'thick narratives', accounts for the empty spaces, the subaltern spaces and postcolonial positions. It allows a fuller range of differences and particularities to emerge.

Likewise, in the sociology of education, recent models reject the notion of scientific work separated from its theoretical foundations and universally applicable. Debates among paradigms and approaches, ranging from modernist to post-modernist perspectives, and structuralist to post-structuralist models, suggest that pretensions to a sense of certainty and analytical precision in a world which is increasingly unpredictable and imprecise may be naive (Samoff 1990; Morrow and Torres 1995). These perspectives in the sociology of education understand reality as a concrete totality with a great degree of variability and volatility; a challenge to traditional linear and evolutionary concepts of knowledge, around which deterministic inferences and deductive conclusions are based and empirical foundations are organised. Being a more flexible, even playful notion of science, empirical events, and theoretical analysis, this sociology of education downplays the normative distinction between value judgements and empirical judgements. It uses open-ended scientific models, searching less for patterns of regularity and universalisable and reproducible results, than for dynamics of transformation of complex totalities which cannot be parceled out into distinct domains. These perspectives in the sociology of education, despite their reliance on case studies and theory-driven methodologies, are highly interdisciplinary and comparative.

Here there is no need for specialised methods to identify laws or law-likes processes. Certainly, reality displays recurrent patterns and regularities. These can be studied at different levels, including meta-theories, middle-range (context-bound) theories, and empirical research including data collection and anlysis. None of these levels can be easily differentiated, or pursued as totally independent instances. However, they are moments in the division of labour of the research process and can be identified as discrete steps. There is a constant iteration in all these moments, with the 'empirical' moment deconstructing the 'meta-theoretical' or 'theoretical' moment and vice versa, in an endless succession of revisions throughout the whole research process. Contrary to the old scientific tendency which emphasises disciplinary rather than interdisciplinary or trans-disciplinary work, these perspectives in the sociology of education tend to be inter-disciplinary, trans-disciplinary, and comparative in nature (Morrow and Torres 1995; Liebman and Paulston 1994; Paulston and Liebman 1994; Torres and Mitchell ****).

This perspective assumes that reality is constituted in non-linear events and profound discontinuities in real life phenomena. This questions traditional notions of objectivity. Here, the notion of social objectivity is not a premise of 'good' research, but an agonising process of striving. It involves a dialectical process, engaging both researchers and the so-called 'research object'. Rather than being an invariant starting point for research, objectivity becomes another goal. It is achieved through iteration, multiple checks and balances throughout the research process, multiple inter-subjective exchanges among researchers and populations 'studied', and the quality of the intellectual analysis which decodifies the different processes of representation (and hence, languages, voices, identities) of the people involved in the research.

Broadening the notion of objectivity implies also the critical reconsideration of the notion of subjectivity. Positivist approaches to comparative education attempt to achieve a universal, clearly established, and procedurally-bound notion of social objectivity, easily attained through the implementation of methodological rules; as if the study can be protected from 'pollution'. The subjectivity and singularity of the researcher is ignored. But in social research there are no simple, easy to apply, and universally applicable rules to be implemented 'hygenically'in a laboratory-like, environmentally controlled manner. The attempt to model comparative research this way is merely misleading. By concealing the role of researcher-as-subject it denies political reflexivity (the comparativist becomes an unthinking tool of the powers-that-be) and hides from scrutiny the effects of the researcher's own intellectual perspectives and practical roles. Against this, we argue that in a reflexive field that is explicit about its own methods, subjectivity is treated not as a liability but as an asset, another input to the inquiry, analysis and explanation.

Global comparative education 1: the new geo-politics

'Globalisation' suggests that nation-to-nation comparisons should be located in a larger analytical framework, noting the tendencies to convergence and other global effects. At the same time, in nation-to-global-standard comparisons, such as large scale cross-country data sets, the culturally specific nature of the global standards (which tend to reflect one or another set of national practices) should be made explicit. There is also a new necessity for comparisons in which the pan-national region is the key unit. In other words, while global effects are contested and uneven, varying between nations, regions and institutions, the nation-state unit ceases to be the ultimate horizon of comparison.

In this context the global dimension itself becomes a key site for comparative and international research: the role and effects of the global agencies, and their relationship with national governments and non-government agencies; the manner in which global effects are fed through national effects and *vice versa*; patterns of cross-national influence including regional influence; global inequalities in resources and educational power. Among the research sites are cross-national portability of people courses and qualifications; the emerging global negotiations on quality assurance and accreditation (van Damme 1999); and comparative policies on cultural harmonising and respect for cross-national difference.

Burgeoning international education opens a host of inquiries, from hybrid subjectivities among mobile students; to the question of the attributes required for educators, institutions and systems in a nationally-interpenetrated educational world; to comparative policies on languages and bi-lingualism; to the patterns of international research collaboration and competition; to the spread of commercial practices in international education and the rsulting tension with pedagogical practices and national cultures; to the mushrooming of on-line education communities and their relationship with national regulation, and so on.

A further set of research problems are generated by the impact of the global dimension at the national level. Modern education systems are still organised locally and nationally, subject to national regulation, and powered by a nation-building mission, albeit an often fragile one (Marginson 2000). The trends to increased mobility and 'cosmopolitanism' have major implications for policies on the preparation of citizens in education. Another set of research is suggested by patterns of global policy borrowing and imitation, which suggests the need for a methodology for studying conditions for successful 'transfer' of educational

policies and practices. For example, the World Bank (1994) model of higher education urges systems to move to mixed public and private funding. Not all nations can draw on a domestic capital base able to underpin major private funding: certainly no other nation, with the possible exception of Japan, has the American capacity for tuition financing, corporate research, and donations from alumni and foundations. Comparative education could research the varying capacities of individual nations to meet this and other global policy norms. In turn this would allow the development of a more nuanced, variable model of public and private financing. Another research agenda triggered by 'globalisation' is to directly examine 'borrowing' itself: to map in and between nations the forms and instances of isomorphism and convergence, and their opposites, self-determination and diversity, in education systems and institutions (Marginson and Considine 2000).

Here the key issue here is whether, to what extent, and within what limits, nationally-determined education practices are viable. What are the conditions necessary to sustain national and local self-determination and difference in the global era? Clearly the answer will vary by nation. To take the extreme case, educational self-determination is not an issue in the USA, but it is a burning issue in many other parts of the world. The problem of 'Americanisation' creates a principal dividing line in the field of comparative education. Remarkably, it is rarely acknowledged by American faculty. There is as yet little *internal* critical reflexivity in relation to the global effects of national American practices, effects mediated not only by government but by universities and by individual faculty.[14] Nevertheless, this problem goes to the heart of both the dyad of sameness/ difference integral to comparison, and the power/ knowledge effects of comparative education in the global era. As such 'Americanisation' is a principal policy and research agenda for independent scholars both inside and outside the USA, while also providing coordinates for dialogue and debate in academic forums. Although comparative education is an American-dominated field complicit in the global-as-convergence, its theories and methods might be redeployed to explain hegemony, difference and self-determination on a world scale.

Comparative education could do this more effectively if there was genuinely equal sharing between different traditions in the field, manifest in a multi-lingual approach. As Garcia Garrido (1982) notes in relation to church Latin in mediaeval Europe that a common language contributes decisively to unity and universality. Diversity of tongues shapes the multiplicity and variety of phenomena accounted for by comparative education. The fact that linguistic diversity is not the norm is symptomatic of 'Americanisation'.

Significant communities in comparative education in Spain and Latin America, Europe and China are under-translated and under-published in English (Altbach 1991). The problem is general to all book publishing, not just in comparative education: Held at al. (1999, 346) provide data showing that 'it is books originally written in English that are overwhelmingly the object of translation into other languages' not *vice versa*. However, to the extent that comparative education is focused on difference as well as sameness, on local specificity as well as global standards, we might expect more curiosity about what non Anglo-American voices are saying, and sensitivity to the rights of the other. For example in comparisons which cross language barriers, comparative researchers need to be conversant with the languages and cultures of all of the nations under study, precluding 'intellectual tourism'.

Global comparative education 2: difference, the self and the other

When modern schooling systems were being built, democratic reformers focused on the generalisation of education and the opportunities it opened up. They favoured universal and homogenous systems that weakened the old exclusions and hierarchies. With difference understood as inequality, the objective was to reduce difference (Tedesco and Blumenthal 1986). With cultural diversity a tool of elite power, the objective was a common culture. But in a global era, homogenising systems deconstruct subaltern identities *without* lifting subaltern status or material position. This suggests that the old democratic agenda needs to be pluralised and one of its axes reversed. The point by Oyen (1990) was that the need is not to discover sameness amid variety, it is to sustain the capacity for difference: the right to cultural self-determination, the universal human right to identity. This raises the question of the conditions under which the right to difference is promoted, and *whose* right of difference it is. In comparative research, it invokes relations between 'self' and 'other'.

We argue that in independent research in comparative education in the global era, the approach to sameness and difference needs to be grounded in an explicit ethic of relations between self and other (this refers not just to individual self/ others, but cross-national and cross-cultural relations between institutions, national authorities, etc.) The forgoing argument suggests that research in comparative education should not privilege the self over the other, or *vice versa*. Rather, it should be concerned to recognise the other, and explain

difference. While all education systems should be transparent to external scrutiny, we support the right of those systems to self-determining identity, including the cultivation and expression of national or regional differences. We seek to replace the *a priori* bias towards global models, with an *a priori* bias against claims to hegemony and in favour of cultural diversity. We seek to replace negative 'othering', with empathy with the other.

We do not take the ultra-relativist position that all sameness and convergence is 'wrong'. By no means all imitations are necessarily undesirable: for example cross-national convergence in participation rates, government spending and aspects of system and institutional modernisation may well be welcome. The issue is the *cultural contents* of curricula, pedagogies and socialisation in education. All else being equal, greater cultural diversity between national systems is a sign of more potent self-determination. From this perspective, a key question for comparative education is the pedagogical, cultural, political and economic preconditions necessary for, say, indigenous identities in education; or the conditions for national policy-determination in a globalising environment.

This kind of research requires a capacity to engage with the identity of the 'other' in a process of 'deep comparison', without the collapse into ultra-relativism. 'Deep comparison' requires a capacity and willingness to change the self, opening the possibility of partial hybridity. Understanding of the other is never complete, but this is true of all relationships.

> The appropriate remedy for xenophobia and ethnocentrism is not a culturally relatavist embrace of all cultures ... but the development of bi-cultural or hybrid awareness, followed by more pluralistic perspectives (Young 1997, 504).

The guiding principle is equality of respect. Our argument is that the comparativist willing to incorporate part of the object of study into her/his own identity – not only willing to acknowledge subjectivity but to treat the transformation of subjectivity as a fruitful part of the process of comparison – can engage more effectively in and draw more profound lessons from the research. This requires recognition that the self lies 'somewhere between, on the one hand, heterogeneity and total plasticity' and, on the other, 'the entirely homogenous, harmonised single self of the myth of character' (Young 1997, 499). In this, the self and other are both open to change, but they are also both valued and sustained. Appreciation of the other does not have to rest on dissolving the self.

No doubt opening the self in this manner can be uncomfortable, even laden with risk. In the positivist approach the process of distancing from the other (the object of study) is

essentially defensive, the assertion of an unchanging inviolable self. The hegemonic comparativist expects all identities and practices to be open to transformation except her/his own. A fixed self is preserved, at the expense of understanding the other, undermining the comparative project. However, 'deep comparison' means that no one system has hegemonic or privileged status. All education systems can be relativised for analytical purposes, without exception. Questions can be raised about the education system from which the comparison is being made, as well as the system or systems with which it is being compared. Questions of relative status and value are open for the duration of the project.

One way to actualise this perspective in cross-national comparison is by using *reciprocal* methodologies. Instead of a solo researcher comparing another national system against her/ his, two researchers each compare the other system against their own system. They then collaborate on the identification of similarities and differences between the two nations, using a hybrid set of criteria constructed through a process of mutual consultation. Subsequently, in the process of validation, they return to the bi-lateral and the reciprocal. 'An interpretation is verified by the other, in the new mutual intercultural ground that the communicative exploration of meaning creates' (Young 1997, 503).

Notes

[1] Mollis 1990 provides a more detailed historical description of the periods and trends in the building of the field of comparative education.

[2] For a precise and revealing account of the positivist method in neo-classical economics see the famous essay by Friedman (1953). Friedman argues that the more universal and less troubled by locality and difference the findings of economics, the more powerful and desirable such findings are. 'Realism' is *not* in his view a valid test of economic conventions.

[3] Note that universal laws and law-like models of explanations are distinct from merely empirical generalisations which address the issue of how to move from empirical observations to definitions of causality.

[4] Crossley (1999) is one who makes this point.

[5] The problems created by the economistic and homogenising usage of 'globalisation' in the Anglo-American neo-liberal discourse are discussed in Clyne et al (2000). See also Marginson 1997.

[6] Among the theorisations of globalisation across the political economy/ culture divide are Harvey (1990), Castells (1996), Appadurai (1996), Keyman (1997) and Held et al (1999).

[7] The word 'prism' refers to the metaphor of the *Object-prism* from Arturo Matute of the UNESCO, in which 'by selecting an Object-prism one is selecting an universe which one expects to enter by means of the critical reading of the former, where each universe has a different quality and any amount of roads to travel' (Matute 1991).

[8] Hence the emphasis on the scholarship of class, race, and gender as an integrated set of theories facing the challenge of postmodernism but also moving beyond the political immobilism of many postmodernist positions.

[9] Two volumes published by UNESCO, containing contributions by Ricoeur et al., constitute excellent examples of the value of constructing inter-disciplinary knowledge: see UNESCO 1979a and 1979b.

[10] An analysis of the theoretical-methodological tendencies of the last thirty years can be found in Abramhs (1989).

[11] Some critics of the hegemonic history of education who argue from the neo-marxist or critical theory standpoint themselves use a totalising, generalising narrative that searches for uniformity and hegemonic ideology: for example those who argue that social class is a simple determinant of school achievement, without space for alternative determinations.

[12] Jurgen Schriewer (1989), Professor of Comparative Education of the University of Frankfurt and member of the European Society of Compared Education, is clarifying. He notes that general accounts of change in meta-scientific discourse have moved from 'the methodological normativity to the socio-historical description'. The diverging types of theories (some scientific, others of reflection) are related to the functional orientations and the concomitant definition of problems present in the different sub-systems of society. He argues that in accordance with these theoretical styles, the different ways of tackling experiences related to 'cultural alterity' end in the 'method of comparison' and the 'exteriorisation facing world situations respectively'.

[13] Respect and consideration for children, understood as human rights, are relatively new social values and not universal: see Epstein 1996.

[14] One exception is the collection of readings in comparative education presented by Kempner at al (1998), but the editors note the difficulty in finding contributions to the literature reflecting subaltern interests.

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Main text and references 12,670
Endnotes 491
Title page 497